



Minutes of the Meeting: 1st July 2010

Venue: Azur, Marina Pavilion

Attendance: 63

Speaker: Cllr Jeremy Birch, Leader of Hastings Borough Council (HBC)

Cllr Birch opened his presentation stating that the values that the Labour controlled council would bring to the town:

- A higher profile leadership with commitment and vision.
- A willingness to intervene and tackle issues such as the pier and 'grotbusting' on the seafront.
- Elected members would make decisions with advice from officers

Labour's vision for the town is to continue the focus of regeneration and the delivery of the '5 Point Plan'

Cllr Birch is keen to continue to tackle the historical image which continues to affect the town - inward investment in to the area is linked to outsiders' often outdated perceptions of a run down, scruffy, declining town.

Labour's local election manifesto has been adopted as the council's programme.

Planning issues: HBC want to facilitate pre-planning application discussions between developers and the community eg. in the case of developments such as the Archery Road site.

Cllr Birch maintained that HBC would act on the sustainability agenda and reduce CO2 emissions including adopting environmental standards on new builds.

HBC has adopted an equalities charter which is being adopted by public bodies across the borough.

HBC will take a tougher stance on:

Licensing houses of multiple occupation (St Leonards and Hastings town centre)
Street drinking
Litter and fly-tipping
Dogs

Cllr Birch outlined the reality of the economic situation and that Hastings was no longer in the position of enjoying the level of funding received historically.

HBC funding is drawn from 2 sources - a core local authority grant for the delivery of services and additional grants received to tackle deprivation issues. The additional grants have been cut this financial year by 7.5% equating to a reduction of £400k of funding. HBC are planning for the worst case scenario of a reduction in funding of 25% over the next 4 years. Cllr Birch is determined that HBC will continue to deliver improvements across the borough, but savings of this size cannot be made through efficiencies.

The government has vowed to protect areas with a high dependency on public sector employment. Hastings – with 43% public sector employment – must not be forgotten amongst the broader view of the region.

Parking: devolution of parking maintenance and enforcement.

Currently the management of on-street and off-street parking in Hastings, and highways issues, are managed by Hastings Borough Council under an agency agreement. However, at its Cabinet meeting next Tuesday (6th July), the County Council is being asked to consider the termination of both the parking management agreement and the highways management agreement.

This scenario would result in all decisions about parking costs, times, enforcement and decisions on appeals against penalty charge notices would be taken by people outside of Hastings.

There is concern that by splitting on-street and off-street parking enforcement, the County Council will be undoing the good work that has been achieved within the Borough over a number of years. Cllr Birch believes Hastings - its residents and many visitors, are far better served by a Hastings-based enforcement operation.

Comments need to be addressed to Cllr Peter Jones (Leader, ESCC) and Rupert Chubb, Director Transport & Environment at ESCC

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

Cllr Birch outlined that there would be cause to re-visit discussions around BIDs, i.e. where town centre businesses contribute to fund services such as street wardens, etc.

Q&A

1. Sustainability – what are HBC doing to assist businesses?

- Through Sea Space there is the continued development of the Enviro21 Business Park
- HBC is currently bidding for ACE European funds to upgrade some of HBC's existing industrial stock.
- HBC is working with partners to identify wind turbine site across Hastings & Bexhill.
- HBC will continue to market Hastings as an environmental business destination with environmental business facilities.

2. Image of the town – why spend funds on consultants & surveys that confirm what we already know? Why not resource a positive PR department rather than just damage limitation?

- Cllr Birch cited the damage of such articles appearing in the Daily Express with photos of Hastings from 10 – 15 years ago
- Cllr Birch announced that there would be a large consultation exercise in the autumn to consult the community on key priorities in line with funding reductions

3. Transport – what is happening?

Cllr Birch confirmed that improvements to the Tonbridge – Pembury improvements and any announcement about the Link Rd are on hold until after the government's Comprehensive Spending Review in September

4. Vision - what town in the world should we aspire to be?

Cllr Birch wants to be a new & improved Hastings. We can learn from other towns & cities but we should look at USPs and build upon them. We do not want to be the next Brighton.

5. The East Hill lift cafe?

The spend on developing the café facility at the top of the East Hill lift café has been reduced to £90k. It will be operated by an existing local business and HBC hope to recoup the investment over 3 years.

6. SEEDA?

SEEDA will be replaced by Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) and will operate at a more local level. There is a desire from government that LEPs will be business led and made up of 50% private sector representation and 50% public sector. Concerns remain how LEPs will be resourced. The government is due to publish a White Paper in July.

7. How do we balance what is attractive about Hastings vs over-development?

Cllr Birch stated that this was subjective and cited the example of the Marina Building which is now a listed building. There is a need to balance 'nurture vs imposition'

8. Coach parking / car parking and infrastructure in the Old Town – lack of thought and common sense applied to current arrangements with coaches dropping –off and parking directly outside sea-front cafes. Lack of parking is hurting trade in the Old Town.

Cllr Birch acknowledged that work was being undertaken to identify more visitor parking spaces in a number of areas in the Old Town and Rock-a-Nore car park.

9. Would Cllr Birch pledge that HBC will continue its dialogue and consultation with the Chamber of Commerce.

Answer: YES.

Date of next meeting: From 7.30am on Thursday 29th July